

MEETING REPORT

REGION III PUBLIC MEETING STRATEGIC PLANNING ISSUES, SOLUTIONS, AND VISION

Location: Fairbanks Princess Riverside Lodge, Fairbanks

Date: October 27, 2001

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OPENING REMARKS:

Kelly Hepler, Director of the Sport Fish Division, opened the meeting pointing out his twin purposes for the strategic planning effort: increasing the effectiveness and accountability of the Division in preserving, protecting, and enhancing sport fishing in Alaska. Director Hepler stressed his desire that this strategic planning support the economic and social importance of sport fishing in the state. He also noted that the strategic planning process will be conducted cooperatively with the public and focus everyone on the state's management activities and recreational fishing opportunities. He indicated that the planning process will include many opportunities for public input over the coming months. Regional Supervisor, Mac Minard, welcomed the participants and reported on regional activities supporting the strategic planning.

MEETING PRODUCTS AND APPROACH:

The meeting facilitator, (Michael Fraidenburg, Dynamic Solutions Group) identified there were three kinds of information needed from the public at this juncture: (1) identification of the major issues and opportunities facing sport fishing right now and in the future; (2) a listing of potential strategies to respond to these issues and opportunities, and (3) articulation of the preferred future, or vision, Alaskans hold for sport fishing. The information sought at these meetings was of a qualitative nature and meant to be an exploratory, first discussion with the public. Refinement of the discussion will occur as the strategic planning process continues. Participants and staff were asked to introduce themselves. Staff were present as observers, but, occasionally were called upon to provide historical or factual content to inform the public's discussions.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONCERNING SPORT FISHING IN ALASKA

Participants in the Fairbanks public meeting identified ten broad issues and opportunities affecting sport fishing now and/or in the future.

Allocation was a widely held concern. The dimensions of this concern included between "user" groups (sport, commercial, subsistence), residents and non-residents, and areas of the state (e.g., downstream versus upstream harvesters). The crux of the issue was fairness in sharing the

conservation burden and the benefits of harvest. A general sentiment was that all values of the resource must be considered and management should error in favor of escapement goals and then provide balanced use in the various fisheries but favoring sport fish use.

In providing **recreational opportunity** the Department should consider diversity of recreational fishing experiences as an important goal. To borrow a concept from the business community, the Department is in the business of providing different “product lines” for different “markets” of recreational use. This variety of opportunity includes subsistence, urban and/or youth fishing (e.g., the Ballaine Lake fishery), “quality” fisheries, trophy fisheries, harvesting for food, and special gear fisheries

Providing **access** infrastructure (e.g., boat ramps) was also a concern since opportunity is linked to legal access to the state’s waters. Also noted was dissatisfaction with the present quantity of handicap accessible fishing opportunities.

A challenge is **increasing demand** for recreational fishing in Alaska. Specific concerns were expressed over reduced opportunity (e.g. shortened seasons, closed areas) to accommodate limited fish supply, crowding on streams and rivers, increased angler impact from improved harvesting technologies, increasing numbers of anglers as the state population grows, and more non-resident anglers coming to Alaska for fishing.

Preserving and enhancing the Department’s **management capacity** is an important variable for the future of sport fishing in Alaska. There is interest in increasing the ability of the Department for “real-time” management, both closing and re-opening fisheries in response to dynamic changes in fish stocks. In potential opposition to real-time management was citizen preference for stability in seasons and open waters. Reducing scientific uncertainty was identified as an important objective since management quality is linked to the knowledge base. Concern exists about program support (staffing, materials, facilities) needed to manage the sport fishery as well as to enhance it in the future.

Enforcement was repeatedly cited as sparse.

Management jurisdiction discord is an issue for Region III citizens. The most prominent distress centers on conflicts between state and federal authorities applying to the same issue (i.e., mixed authority over the same species, over the same geography, and over subsistence harvest).

An **information and education** shortfall was prominently expressed. Educating citizens about resource management principles (e.g., biological processes, management rationales, human impacts) as well as providing “how to” and “where to” information about recreation opportunities are both needed.

Conservation issues included resolving the role of hatcheries and stocking programs in the overall management of sport fishing. Citizens expressed widely divergent opinions. Some citizens see hatcheries and stocking as a risk to preferred sport fishing opportunities and the appropriate management philosophy of the Department. Other citizens see hatcheries and

stocking as essential elements in a contemporary management program and the only way to maintain some existing fishing opportunities. Some citizens are concerned about the “associated” impacts on Alaska’s sport fish resource of activities such as the impacts of jet boats on fish, catch and release impacts, and co-mingling of exotic species with native Alaskan species.

In the **strategic planning process** itself there is a need to address cultural differences throughout the state, acknowledge the growing economic impact of sport fishing on the state’s economy, and promote cooperation and partnerships.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

When asked to summarize the discussion of issues and opportunities, the participants isolated the following as important along with a beginning list of strategies to deal with these (in parentheses).

Strengthen enforcement (more officers, include an education mission in enforcement, and adopt compliance as the enforcement goal).

Want a balanced, quality fishery (develop a range of fishery definitions, and better information and education).

Want predictable [equal] fishing opportunity (allow catch and release in otherwise closed fisheries, develop local, year-around fisheries, and ensure upstream escapement targeted for upstream fishing).

Address the lack of access (develop more local, urban, over-winter, and low cost fisheries, private/public partnerships with the Department, trail access to remote lakes, signs and education, and planning to reflect seasonal weather restrictions).

Improve management responsiveness to changing pressure (appropriate use of supplemental stocking and ADF&G perform a coordination role among conflicting interests).

Concern about habitat (bring information to the media and the public, increase penalties and enforcement presence, and create incentives to do the right thing).

Need better education in schools (better pamphlets, joint Wildlife and Fisheries teaching aids, and develop a high school science curriculum on fish and wildlife).

Ensuring that citizen issues and interests being heard in a dual management system (create an ombudsman position, add urban residents to the Federal Regional Advisory Councils).

Need diverse fishing opportunities (more information hand-outs and professional publications).

Address the lack of a good research database for management (fund non-salmon projects, incentives for agency staff to do more research and publishing, partnerships between schools and the Department).

Need to address cultural differences (Departmental communication with tribal elders and facilitating rural community acceptance that allows non-locals to enjoy the resource).

Funding base for plan implementation (legislative activism and public/private partnerships).

Public education needs – management rationale not well understood (more professional – quality publications and increased number of publications).

Need explanation of process in the strategic plan (spend more on training, publicize master plans for areas, manage by ecosystems, and get planners out into the field).

Need funding prioritization (more citizen participation, establish decision making criteria, create a public liaison in Juneau, subsidize local interests groups to help the Department, and use cost/benefit as well as other criteria for decision making).

PREFERRED FUTURE (VISION) FOR SPORT FISHING IN ALASKA

In answer to the question: “What sport fishing legacy do you want to leave your grand kids?” the leading aspirations were for a healthy natural resource, a fair, cooperative and conflict resolving work environment, robust citizen access to decision making, and a balanced, productive array of predictable fishing opportunities. There is a vision to have all fishery sectors and Department Divisions acting with one voice and one set of goals coupled with the various publics stepping up to the plate to manage their own future. Also highlighted were the value of having a “master plan,” managing escapement for broad ecosystem goals, and providing an economically viable sport fishery.

MEETING EVALUATION

Participants would enhance the quality of future meetings like this by continuing to ensure there is balanced audience participation, having agency leadership present, respectful communications, and explorations of consensus among the diversity of participants (i.e., “Good to know how close we are in our beliefs and outlook for the future.”). The participants would improve meetings by changing the meetings to ensure better advertisement and audience recruitment, addressing concerns about follow-through on the meeting results, and giving participants a better fix on what Fish and Game wants from the public when they come to the meeting.

PARTICIPANTS: Howard Van Ness, L. G. Swartz, Norman Kellman, Chris Matthews, Oliver and Andrea Backland, Jan Johnston, Tim Shannon, Mike McDougall, Byrod Haley, Virgil Umphenour, Henry Garbowski, Mike Tinker, Reed Morisky, John Morack, Rich Harris, Russell Smith, and Jerry Brown.

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